in exchange
for throw-away dreams.

The lines of takers are long.

Now is the time
to be an undertaker
in the ghetto,
a black dress seamstress.
Now is not the time
to be a Black mother
in the ghetto,
the father of sons,
the daughters of any of them.

At the end of heavy breathing
I engage in arguments
with my ancestral memories.
I'm not content
with nationalist propaganda.
I'm not content
loving my Black life
without question.
The answers of Negritude
are not absolute.
The dream of King
is incomplete.
I probe beneath skin surface.
I argue with my nappy hair,
my thick lips so difficult
to assimilate.
Up and down the block we battle,
cussing, kicking, screaming,
threatening to kill
with bare hands.

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At the end of heavy breathing
the dream deferred
is in a museum
under glass and guard.
It costs five dollars
to see it on display.
We spend the day
viewing artifacts,
breathing heavy
on the glass
to see—
the skeletal remains
of black panthers,
pictures of bushes,
canisters of tears.